Out of the Closet:

A Gay Manifesto

by
Allen Young

ON A JUNE EVENING TWO YEARS AGO, police began what seemed like a routine raid on the Stonewall Inn, then Greenwich Village's most popular gay men's bar. But the raid didn't go off as planned. We fought back. The gay liberation movement was born.

I am smiling ironically as I write "we." I wasn't there, and it took me more than six months before I even began to take part in the gay liberation movement. I was a "closet case," an oppressed homosexual, oppressed in America, oppressed in the movement. I might well have been on Christopher Street—home of the Stonewall Inn—that June night. I had been there at the dancing bar, favorite hangout of the most free gay people—those most likely to be labeled "fag" and "drag queen"—several times that spring. I wasn't comfortable there; I preferred the more uptight and sedate (read: "masculine") crowd at Danny's, a few blocks closer to the waterfront. Had I been in the Village at all that night, I suspect I would have stayed discreetly on the sidelines, perhaps even split the scene altogether. Sure, I was a homosexual, and, as a member of SDS and a writer for Liberation News Service (LNS), I was into fighting the pigs. But I couldn't have handled this swift coming together of the personal and the political. America—and the movement—had taught me too well how to make the separation.

My journey out of the closet had its beginnings during my sophomore year in college. I became friends with a classmate, our friendship growing out of our shared interest in politics, our classes together, and our work on the college paper. In retrospect, I presume we were also physically attracted to each other. One day, after we'd known each other for months, we were sitting on a bed in a dormitory room. Suddenly I was aware of a burst of sexual energy. Without saying a word, we made love. It happened again a few nights later. While our relationship gradually became what is sometimes known as a "love affair," we didn't have any of the romantic satisfaction found in the world of fiction. It was mostly very scary. This was homosexuality—certainly we knew that—and we sensed the ponderous weight of a centuries-old taboo. If we made this an open free love, we concluded in our mutual silence, it would destroy us as successful college men. We chose silence and

secrecy. Our fear and shame were the keys to survival.

I became editor-in-chief of the college paper; he also joined the staff. We took all of the same classes. We ate all our meals together, and we became roommates. To all our friends, and even in our own minds, we were just college buddies. No one "suspected." We knew no other gay people—that was the last thing on our minds. The passion we knew in bed at night was always muffled by our inability to say "I love you," by the awareness that the whole world which was rewarding us as men was saying "no" to our homosexuality. On several occasions we managed to talk briefly about what was happening to us, but we never said anything positive about the closeness and ove we were experiencing. We knew on one level that it felt very good; but we also had a clear understanding how homosexuality is "untenable"—that's one word I definitely remember using. We agreed to stop having sex, but we started up again. Finally, as the end of our senior year came closer, we made another agreement to stop having sex. Our identity as men still intact, we took the next logical step. We acquired girlfriends to affirm our heterosexuality.

A couple of years later, aided by the independence of life on a Fulbright grant in Brazil, I decided to stop running away from my homosexuality. I knew I wasn't straight, and I gave up pretending. It wasn't quite coming out all the way, as I maintained a double existence and continued to feel that my homosexuality was a misfortune, but at least I was beginning to come to terms with myself.

As for my friend, he went through a series of affairs with women, and then, gradually, became a kind of a hermit. He even ended his friendships with his brother and his close friends (accusing some of them of being "faggots"). He started writing odd tracts, eventually declaring himself a genius, the bearer of great religious and political insights and wisdom. Sometime last year, his mother had him committed to a mental hospital. The cops came to take him away. His jailers called him a "paranoid schizophrenic." I don't know if or when he will come out of the hospital, but I feel in my guts that his mental health will return only when he can feel free enough to be gay. I also know that this is not the approach the hospital staff will take; they would rather keep him locked up than affirm anyone's homosexuality. That is why I consider him—and the thouands of gay people like him—to be political prisoners.

GAY LIBERATION IS A STRUGGLE against sexism. We are only beginning to define this word. At the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention meeting in Philadelphia, the male homosexual workshop put it this way:

"Sexism is a belief or practice that the sex or sexual orientation of human beings gives to some the right to certain privileges, powers, or roles, while denying to others their full potential. Within the context of our society, sexism is primarily manifested through male supremacy and heterosexual chauvinism. Since in the short run, sexism benefits certain persons or groups, in the long run it cannot serve all the people, and prevents the forming of complete social consciousness among straight [i.e., heterosexual] men. Sexism is irrational, unjust and counterrevolutionary. Sexism prevents the revolutionary solidarity of the people."

Sexism reveals itself in many ways. Of course, there are the overtly male-supremacist, anti-homosexual institutions of our society: the legal system and the police, the church, the nuclear family, the mass media, and the psychiatric establishment. Much of the energy of gay liberation is directed against these institutions. But sexism is a part of all people, too, present in many of our behavior patterns. Dealing with sexism, usually through a small group process, is also essential to gay liberation. These small groups vary in nature, from rather formal "consciousness-raising groups" to less formal communes or groups of friends or roommates. The goal of this small-group process is the elimination of inequalities in human relationships, inequities brought about through role-playing sexual objectification.

Our struggle as gays is to eliminate oppressive patterns that straights have burdened us with. Many gay men play either male or female roles. Some people think that this only has to do with what happens in bed. Although sex may be a factor, however, role-playing permeates all areas of human interaction. I was socialized into playing a male role. It didn't come easy: I knew that I threw a baseball "like a girl," and I have always been worried about my "femininity." But a time did come when I could feel comfortable about my ability to pass for a "real man." Most important, I could hide my gayness.

Sexual objectification has to do with seeing other human beings in terms of the superficial alone—face, body, clothes. Phrases like these, often heard among gay men, are sexist and sexually objectifying: "Those blue jeans really turn me on." "He has a big cock." "I'm only attracted to young blonds." "He's too swishy; if I wanted to sleep with a woman, I'd do it with a real woman." I have thought or said all of these things at one time or another. Gay liberation is teaching me how this oppresses me and others.

The worst thing about being gay is experiencing the anti-homosexuality of society. To survive in a hostile environment, most gays hide their homosexuality. The result is the fear associated with the possibility of discovery, and the shame and guilt associated with homosexual dreams, daydreams, desires and acts. For an important minority of homosexuals—those who are identified as such because they have the mannerisms, clothing or speech patterns usually reserved for the other sex—the oppression takes on different forms. The blatantly gay are often subject to verbal abuse, physical brutality from police and other thugs, and the knowledge that even those who can tolerate discreet homosexuality will not tolerate this turn-around of sex-determined roles.

While anti-homosexual feelings run high in America, there is also a great awareness of homosexuality as a phenomenon. Some of America's most popular swear words—"shove it up your ass" and "you dirty cocksucker," for example—express at the same moment the straight man's awareness of homosexuality and the repugnance he feels towards it.

Gay liberation, on the surface of it, is a struggle by homosexuals for dignity and respect—a struggle for civil

rights. Of course we want to "come out" (that is, to end our hiding), to forbid such terms as "faggot," "dyke," and "queer," to hold down jobs without having to play straight, and to change or abolish those laws which restrict or denegrate us. Beyond that, our movement stands for the total abolition of sex-determined roles in society—and in bed.

Most male homosexuals are still trapped by notions of masculinity. It is a familiar story—the oppressed worship the oppressor. Listen to the names of some of America's gay men's bars—The Stud, the Tool Box, the Barn. What passes for gay men's art—including murals in these bars—often depicts such masculine characters as the body-builder, the motorcyclist, the cowboy. What goes on inside most of these gay bars often preserves the notion that the people inside are "real men," too. The billiard table, the sawdust on the floor, the leather vest on the bartender, and, most of all, the men standing around with cheerfully groomed indifference while quaffing their beer (just like good collegians or dockworkers). The gay man's quest for exaggerated masculinity is evidence of oppression, evidence of how a minority is overwhelmed by the values and style of the majority.

Some additional observations about gay bars are necessary. On one level, these gathering places are products of a system we are striving to eliminate. First, they perpetrate male supremacy; second, most of them are owned by greedy gay capitalists or greedier criminal syndicates. It is impossible, however, to escape a crucial fact: aside from the meetings of gay organizations, these bars are the only places where large numbers of gay people get together. As congregating places (particularly for gay men, although there are a handful of lesbian bars in the biggest cities), the gay bars can be focal points of conflict between our new spirit of liberation and the forces which would keep us "in our place" and ghettoized.

The 1969 raid on the Stonewall Inn bar is accepted as the birthday of gay liberation. Since then, police action against gay bars in Los Angeles has led to mobilization of hundreds of gay people. One of New York's most militant demonstrations—a spontaneous march and vigil in Greenwich Village one winter ago—occurred after a police raid on the Snake Pit. The cops busted the operators of this after-hours bar on a liquor law technicality, typically choosing a busy Saturday night so the raid could intimidate a maximum number of patrons and look good for the politicians and the police brass. The people at the Snake Pit, 167 in all, were carted off to the precinct house. Most of those arrested were afraid—of the police, at the very least and, beyond that, that the arrest and the homosexual connection would be reported to employer or family. One man jumped from a second story window and came close to death when he impaled himself on five spikes of an iron fence.

In San Francisco, gay people are organizing legal defense and propaganda around the case of Charles Christman, a gay brother shot by police, then placed under arrest and charged with attempted homocide. Christman's arrest came after police arbitrarily broke up a crowd of gay men congregating outside The Stud. As Christman was leaving, one cop told him to beat it and another told him to stop. In the confusion, Christman tried to drive off. The cops say he tried to run down several police officers—supposedly justifying their trigger-happy response. In Houston, the Gay Liberation Front used a picket line to successfully break the racist lily-white policy of a gay men's bar.

LEGAL REPRESSION IS A DAY-TO-DAY FACT for all homosexuals. Every "practicing" homosexual is an outlaw, for gay love (under the legal category of "sodomy") is a crime in all but two states (Connecticut and Illinois). In New York State, the sodomy laws prohibit any contact between the mouth and the penis, the mouth and the vulva, and the penis and the anus.

Few sodomy convictions are for contact between "consenting adults." Changes in the legal codes to allow such sex acts between consenting adults have come in Illinois and Connecticut (and in Great Britain), but this has not made a difference in the basic oppression of homosexuals in these places.

Earlier this year in New York State, a handful of lawmakers backed a bill which would extend the state's fair housing and fair employment legislation to include homosexuals, but the effort failed. In fact, by our mere existence and life style, gay people are perpetual outlaws. For example, in most states it is illegal to invite someone home with you for the purpose of sex. Since gay people (especially men) do this frequently, we are constantly in danger of being arrested for "solicitation." (The laws against "solicitation" are violated constantly by straight men any time they whistle at a woman or say something like, "Hey, baby, wanna come home with me?", but virtually all arrests for solicitation are of prostitutes, transvestites and gay males.) Many solicitation arrests are entrapment cases.

One of the most significant court cases in gay liberation was that of the "D.C. 12." Twelve gay brothers attending the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention last Thanksgiving weekend in Washington, D.C., were arrested at the Zephyr, a straight, lily-white restaurant. After four gay brothers were refused service, several carloads of gay people responded by filling up the restaurant. When some straight patrons and the manager started to push the gay brothers out, they fought back. The restaurant was damaged. The police came and made 12 arrests, charging destruction of property, assault, etc. As the case developed, defense attorneys won the right to carry out a *voir dire*, that is, to question the jurors as to their prejudice against homosexuals. Later, when it was revealed that witnesses had illegally seen the defendants in jail before viewing them in a line-up, the government had to drop all the charges. Winning the right to do a *voir dire* on sexism is considered to be an important precedent for future cases involving gay people.

No one knows for sure how many gay people are in jail, but it is an acknowledged fact that many men's jails have a special tier or section for homosexuals. For most people, linking up the word "homosexual" and the word "jail" conjures up images of sex perverts attacking "normal" men. The gay liberation movement is beginning to break through the distortions, lies, half-truths and ignorance on this topic. First of all, every jail has a significant number of gay

(Continued page 60

people—homosexuals who are known to be homosexuals by the authorities and who acknowledge their homosexuality. Like most oppressed people who are carted off by the police to the nation's prisons, these gay people are victims of a vicious system. Whether the charge emerges directly from their homosexuality (sodomy, solicitation, "lewd conduct"), or indirectly (burglary, prostitution, shoplifting), all gay prisoners are political prisoners.

To the extent that there are violent homosexual acts in any jail, this is due exclusively to the aggressive behavior of straight men. Open homosexuals, homosexuals trying but failing to pass for straight, or straight men who are slight of build and capable of being seen as a female sex object—these are the victims of rape and sexual assault from brutal, straight male prisoners. Such sex is a form of bogus homosexuality which is nothing but a parody of heterosexuality.

IN THE 1950s, WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER and realized that the word "homosexual" had something to do with the way I was feeling and behaving, I tried to get the facts. I was already overwhelmed with a sense of my abnormality; I had no idea there were millions of other teenagers going through the very same thing. Everywhere, in the newspapers and magazines, on radio and TV, in the movies, there wasn't the slightest affirmation of homosexuality. If the subject ever made an appearance, it was in terms of ridicule or condemnation. But mostly, there was nothing. The overwhelming message of boy-girl, man-woman love came through in every novel and every comic book I ever read.

Now it is becoming more common to find homosexuals appearing, in some way or another, in the media. More often than not, however, the homosexuals portrayed are stereotypes, or otherwise shown in a negative way. In *Up Tight*, a movie about black militants, there is a homosexual police informer. The so-called progressive movie-maker who put together *Z* went out of his way to portray one of the young Greek fascists as a homosexual. Then there was Little Horse, the gay Indian in *Little Big Man*, played as a redskin faggot for racist, sexist laughs in the movie. And as for *Boys in the Band*, the movie that brought a part of the gay world to the American masses for the first time, it depicts a sad collection of stereotypes in a story designed to win pity and perhaps tolerance from liberals. If this is not bad enough, the conclusion of the movie evokes stormy applause from straights when the closet-case friend of the birthday party host affirms his straightness and goes back to his wife. This movie (some reviewer somewhere must have called it "courageous") doesn't even dare to show two men kissing on the screen. Its homosexuals are so pitiful that it hardly serves as affirmation for someone trying to come out.

In the 1950s, I looked up the word "homosexuality" in the index of every book on psychology or sex or health that I could find. The mere association of homosexuality with medicine, of course, is oppressive. Beyond that, almost every reference was negative—Freudian nonsense about arrested sexual development, or, still worse, categorical statements about homosexuality being a mental illness and urgings that homosexuals seek "help."

One of the most macabre set of anti-homosexual lies is contained in the middlebrow super-best-seller: David Reuben's *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex. . .But Were Afraid to Ask*. In a chapter entitled "Male Homosexuality" (he ignores female homosexuals altogether), Reuben, a psychiatrist, projects an image of crazed faggots sticking carrots and cucumbers up their asses, and categorically asserts that no homosexual can possibly be happy.

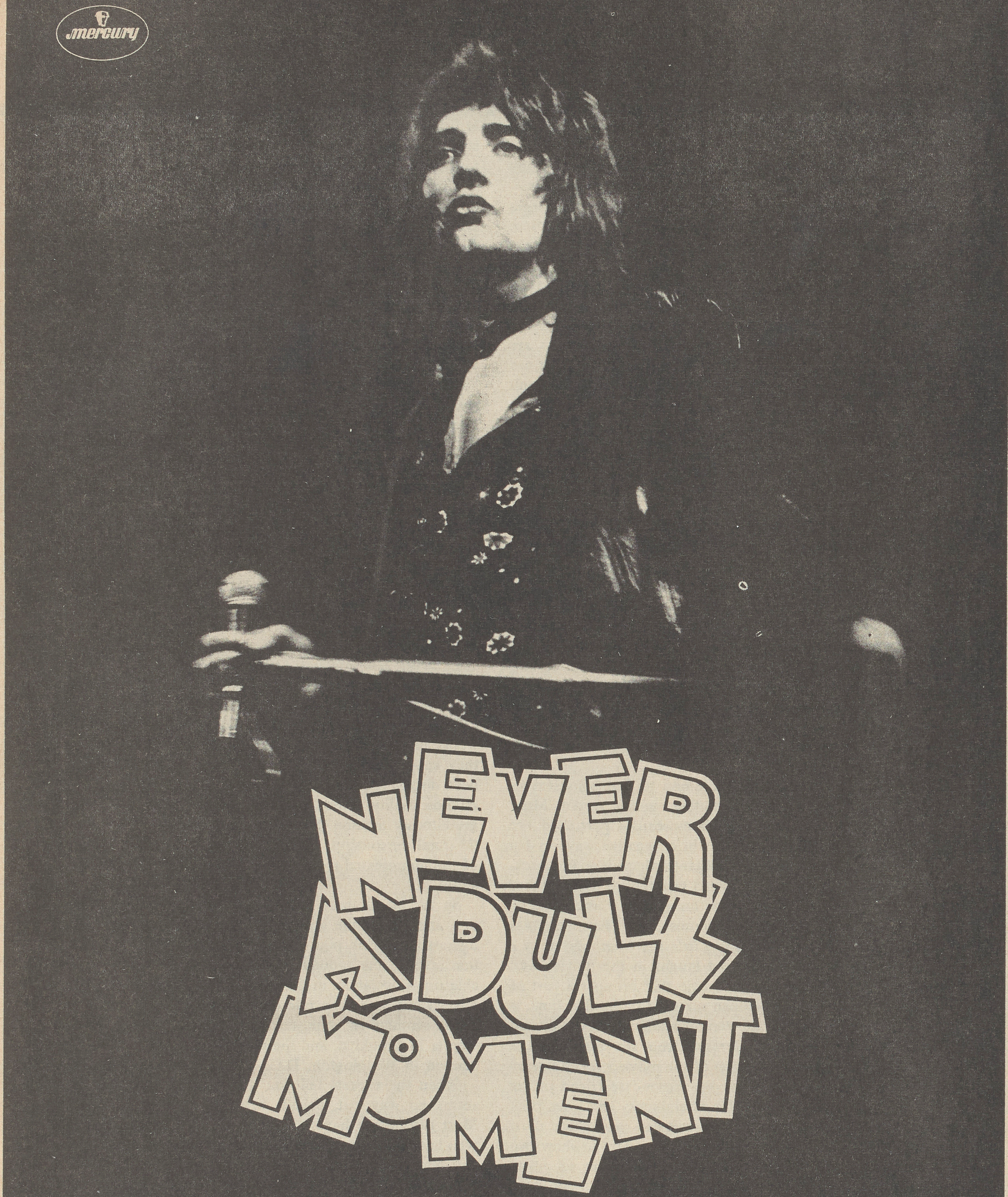
But sitting above popularizers like Reuben is a six-man rogues' gallery of shrinks who are most responsible for the "scientific" facade which covers the oppression of homosexuals. Each of these psychiatrists has written a successful book, and each has become rich by convincing homosexuals that they can be "cured" (even when all the evidence points in the opposite direction). What is more serious, each is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the suicide of countless gay people, and for the incarceration of countless others in jails, mental hospitals and juvenile centers. The suffering and cruelty promoted by these six shrinks places them, in my eyes, in the ranks of the worst of war criminals. Here they are, in order of appearance: Edmund Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life* (1957); Irving Bieber, *Homosexuality* (1962); Albert Ellis, *Homosexuality: Its Causes and Cure* (1964); Charles Socarides, *The Overt Homosexual* (1968); Lionel Ovesey, *Homosexuality and Pseudo-homosexuality* (1969); and Lawrence J. Hatterer, *Changing Homosexuality in the Male* (1970).

These books speak with a confidence and authority that would be laughable if it were not for the infinite suffering they cause. Bergler, for example, writes: "It has recently been discovered that homosexuality is a curable illness. . . . Homosexuality is not the 'way of life' these sick people gratuitously assume it to be, but a neurotic distortion of the total personality. . . . The entire personality structure of the homosexual is pervaded by the *unconscious* wish to suffer."

So far, it has only been homosexuals from gay liberation and homophile groups who have launched an assault against the shrink pigs. Since May 1970, when gay liberation invaded the national convention of the American Psychiatric Association in San Francisco, angry homosexuals haven't missed a chance to disrupt similar events, such as a recent seminar on homosexuality at the Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, and the most recent psychiatrists' convention in Washington, D.C., during Mayday events.

When the experts tell you that you are sick, and there seems no way out, suicide often emerges as a solution. Most gay people have friends, or at least know of people, who have killed themselves as a direct result of experiencing gay oppression. When I read about a suicide, or hear of one, I immediately want to know, "was the person gay?" With suicide as a major cause of death in America, the people in the medical profession have a clear choice: adopt the ideas of gay liberation and get rid of the shrink pigs, or remain their accomplices.

The books by the Big Six are virtually the only books on homosexuality available in the average bookstore or public



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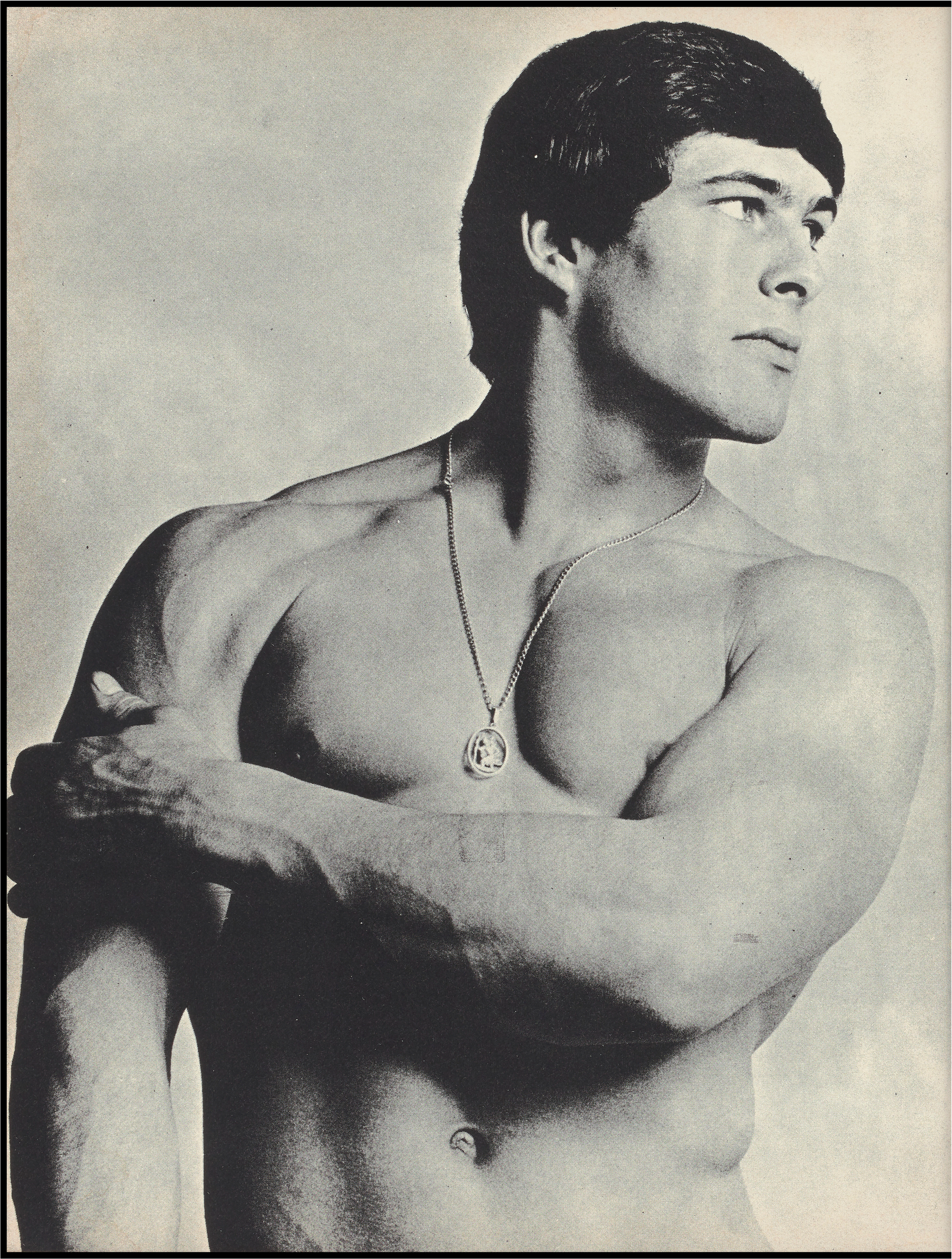
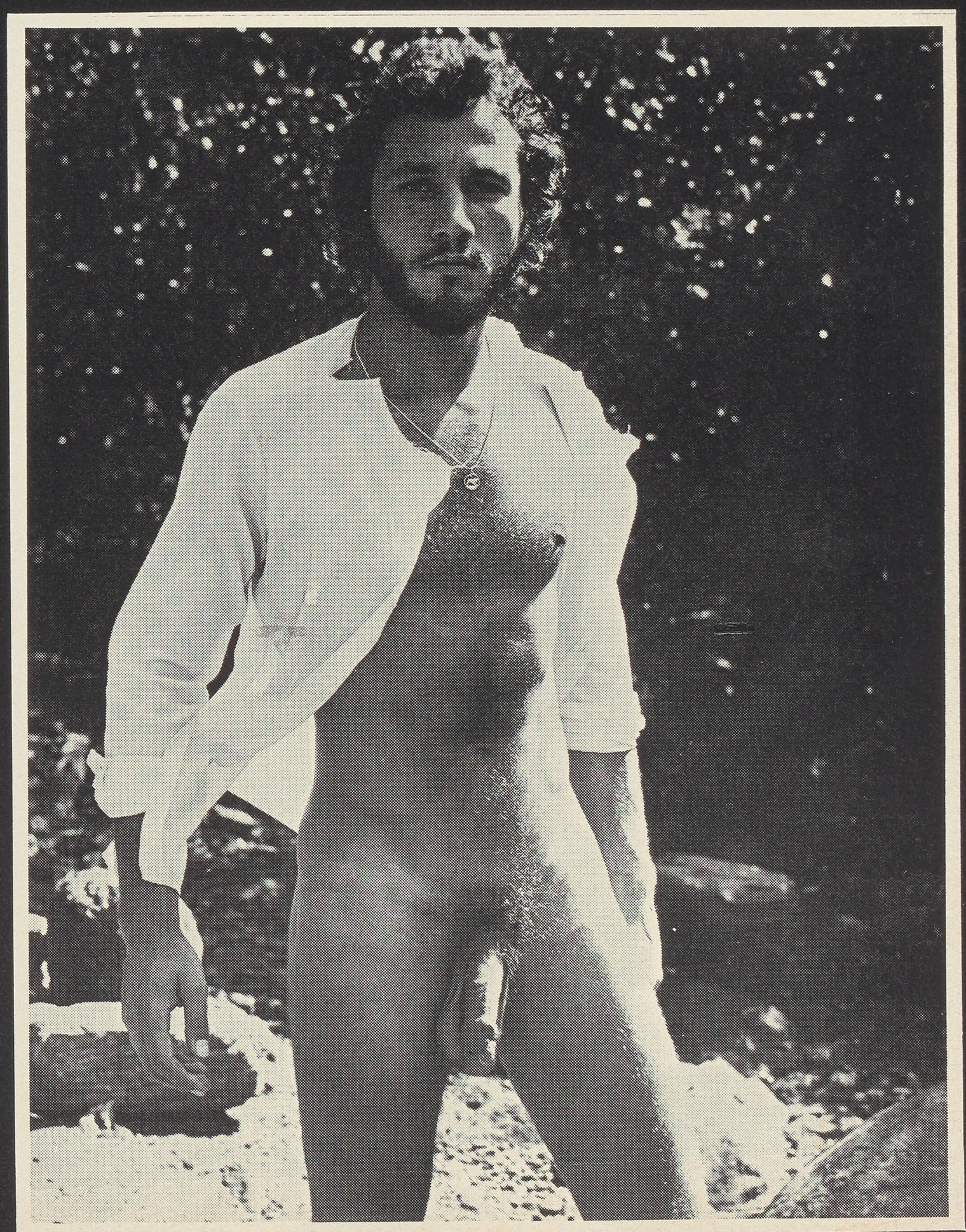
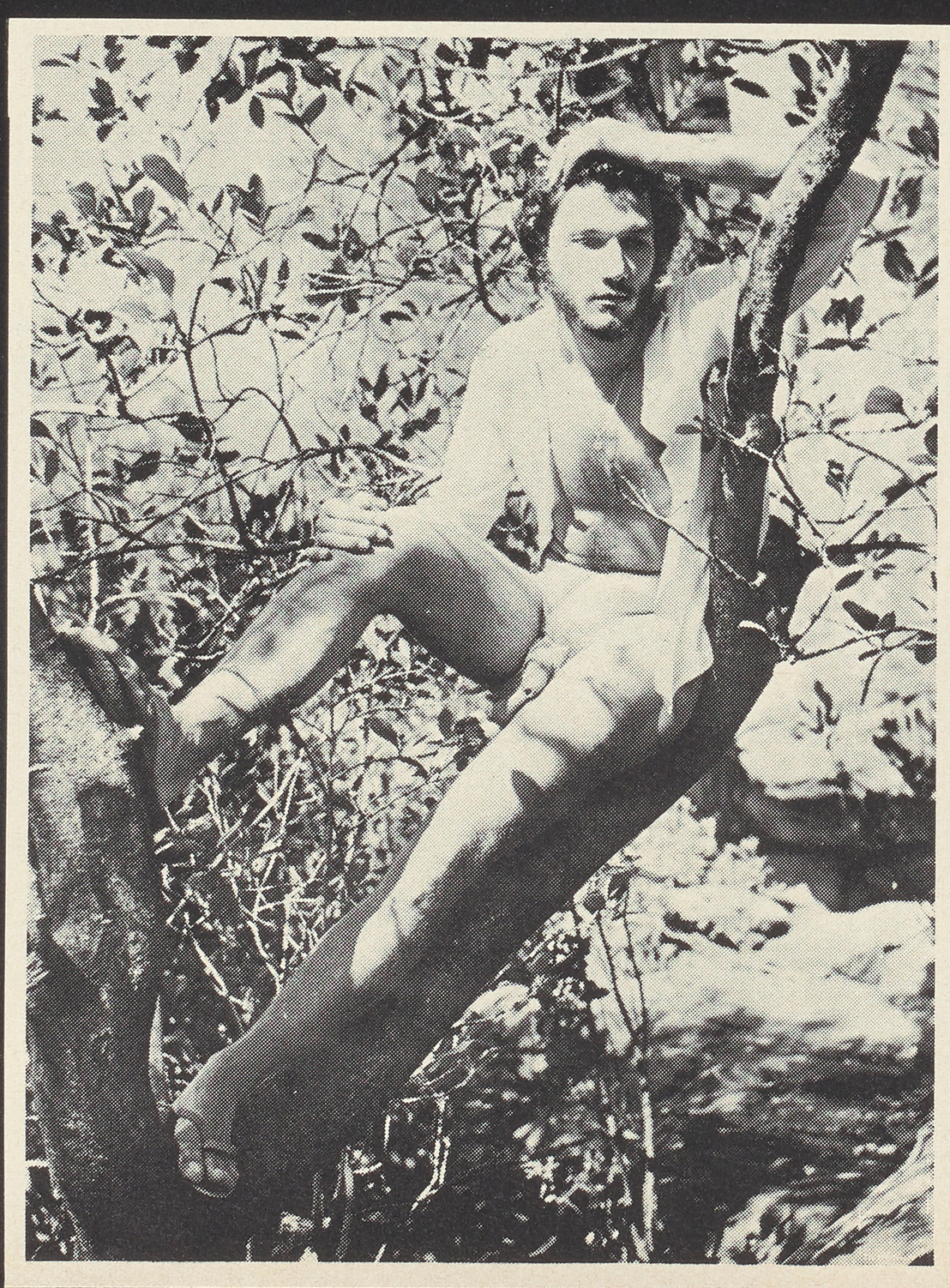
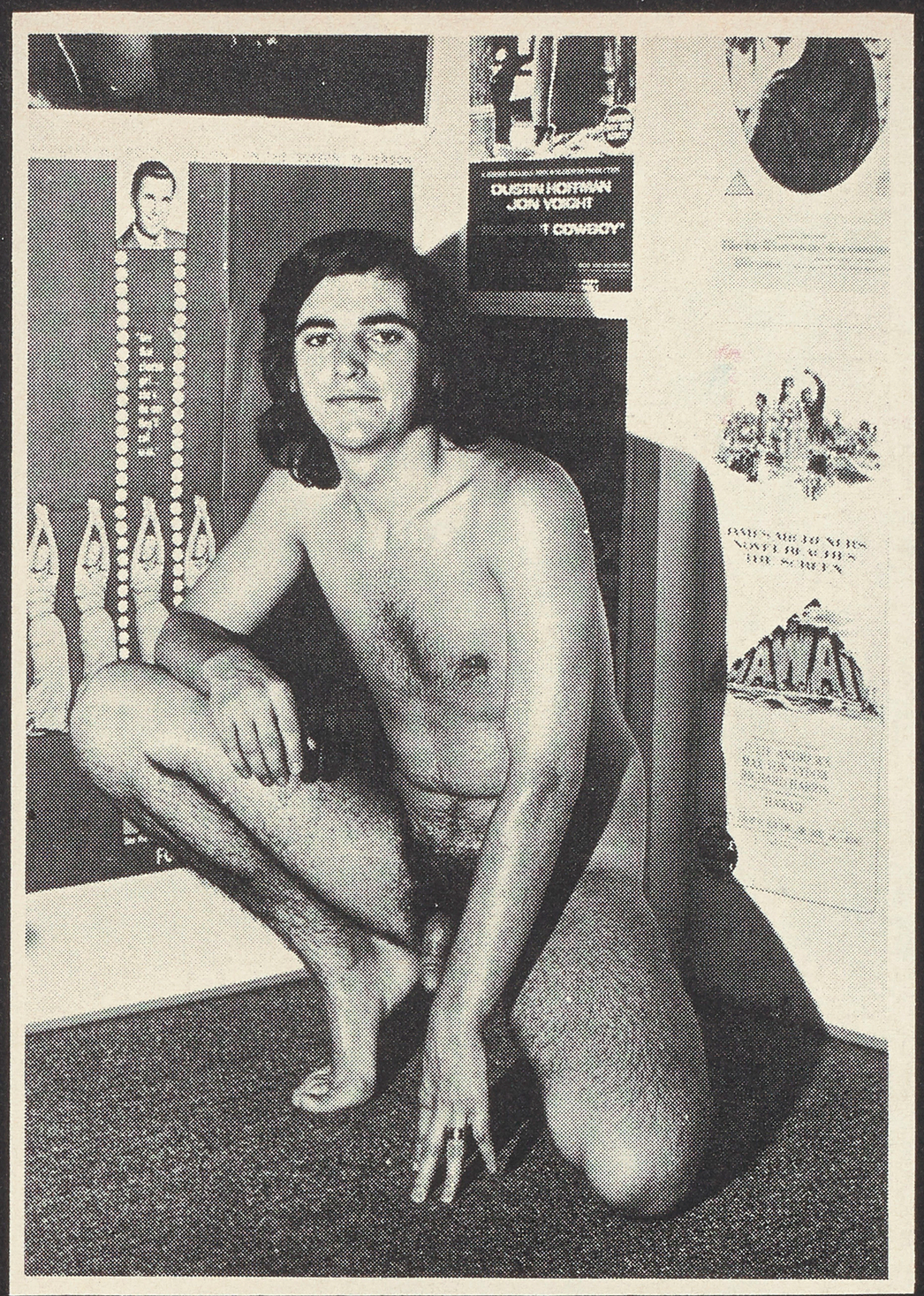







DUSTIN HOFFMAN
JON VOIGHT
"COWBOY"

The Green Slime
DRAC

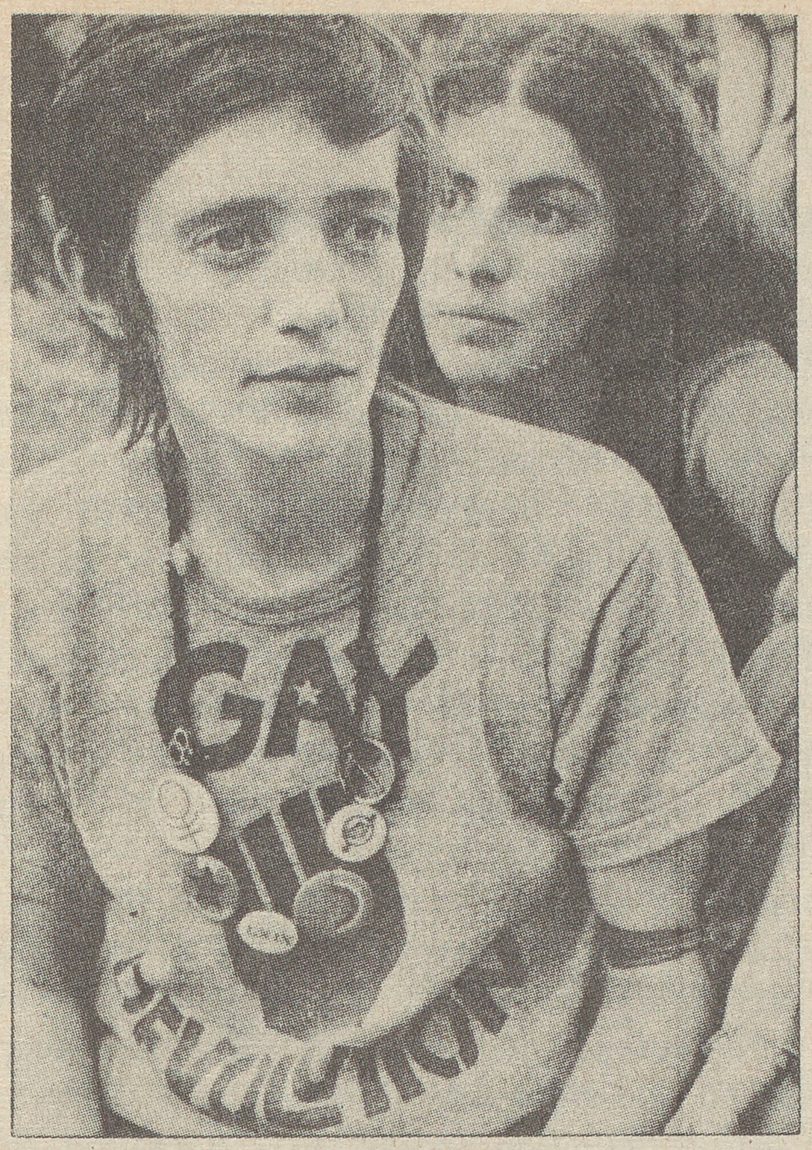
Garcia

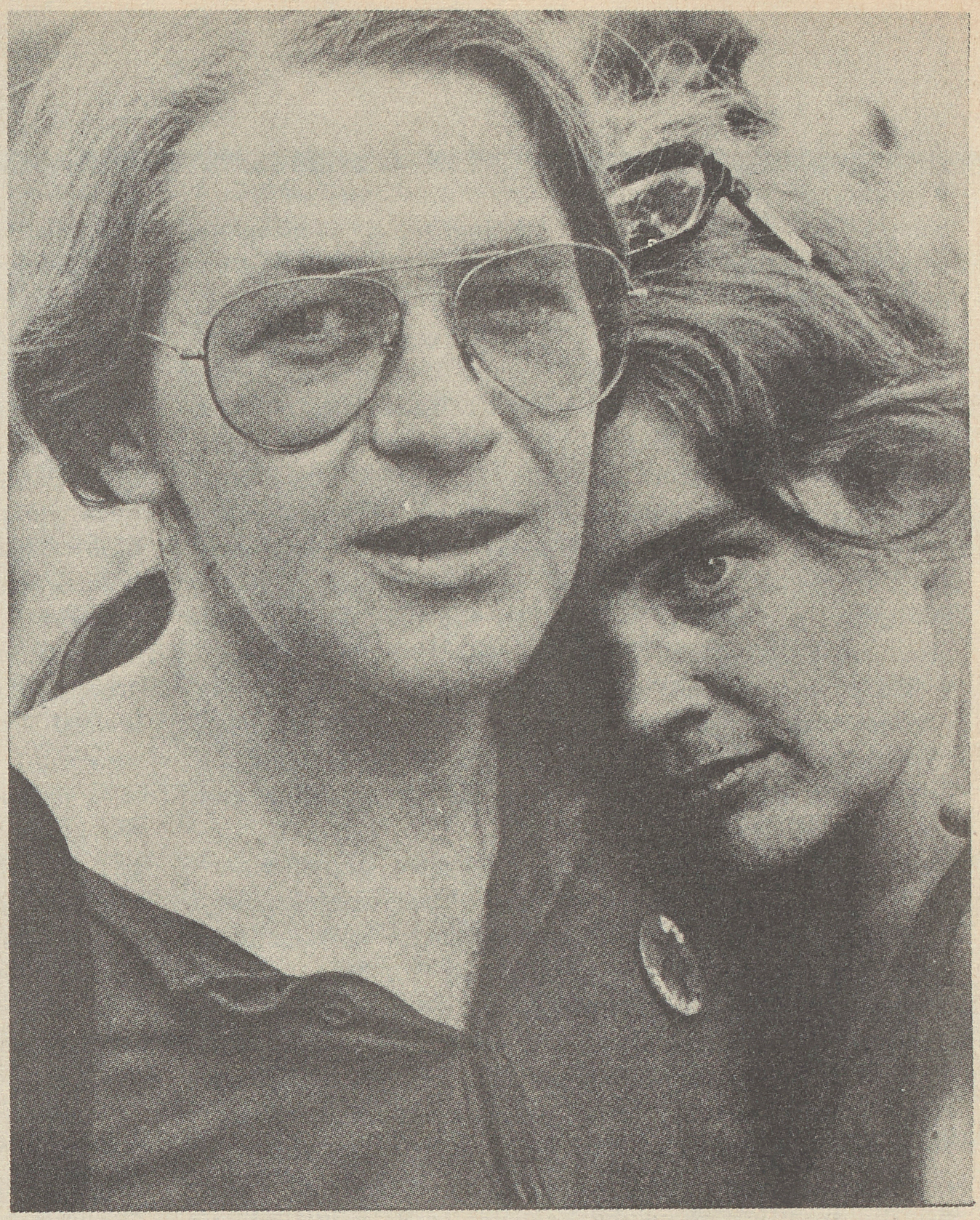
On Warner Bros. Records (and tapes, distributed by Ampex)

library. Virtually the only pro-gay book of the 1950s, Donald Webster Cory's *The Homosexual in America* (1951), was published by a tiny publishing house and was generally not available until the recent publication of a new edition. Years ago at the Library of Congress, I found the title on a file card under "Homosexuality," but it was kept in the "Delta" section (along with pornography and rare manuscripts). I was able to read it there only by bracing myself to overcome my fear that upon my signing for the book (I had to show ID), a librarian would telephone my family and my high school. A few pro-homosexual books are set for publication in 1971, but if Random House had trouble distributing *Woodstock Nation,* you can imagine how conservative librarians and book distributors will respond to something on gay liberation. The first of these new books, *The Gay Militants* by Donn Teal, has already appeared.

THE TRADITIONAL LEFT, both Old Left and New Left, has been as oppressive to homosexuals as has establishment America. I grew up in a Communist Party household, and I learned at an early age about socialism, about how the workers are unjustly exploited by the bosses, about the beautiful system known as socialism. I also quickly learned that socialism wasn't for fairies, because my parents and their friends would occasionally make jokes about fairies. I also knew that I was a fairy (I didn't want to be one, of course, but that's what they called me in school). In any case, it was much easier to identify with socialism than with being a fairy. (The Communist Party is still anti-homosexual. Its paper, *The Daily World,* has published at least one anti-homosexual cartoon, and CP picket captains in New York physically assaulted gay people who wanted to march with gay banners in support of Angela Davis.)

I joined the staff of Liberation News Service in Washington, D.C., shortly after it was founded in the autumn of 1967. By then, I was actively homosexual. I used to sneak away from the LNS office, and from my "comrades" in SDS, to meet other homosexuals. I always enjoyed the irony of cruising [i.e., looking for a sex partner] in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, but the emotion I most remember is anger and sadness as I wandered through that park. I never met a homosexual like myself—someone from the movement—a situation which reinforced my sense of aloneness and uniqueness. With good reason, too—the oppressive sexist power of the movement itself was keeping us apart. Now I know more of what was really happening: at one time, there were no fewer than six male homosexuals associated with LNS in Washington. One had a few gay experiences but actively projected his heterosexual image. One called himself "pansexual," shied away from gay experiences and began an affair with a woman. Still another, repressing his homosexual feelings, was having an affair with a woman. One was a man in his thirties who felt that he would be unable to work politically if he was open about his gayness and "satisfied" himself by having mostly non-sexual friendships with





teenage boys. One was totally asexual in practice, though actively gay in his fantasies and manner—on Nov. 1, 1969, he ran a vacuum cleaner hose from his car's exhaust pipe to his front vent window, saying good-bye to the world and the movement.

It was even worse inside SDS. I attended most of the large national council meetings of SDS in the period from December 1967 until the stormy final convention of June 1969. I felt totally alone as a homosexual, incapable of telling any of those people about myself. The gay love I wanted to express was prohibited while the straight men played musical beds.

Some people seem to think that things have gotten better. In small ways, maybe they have. Homosexuals do not have to be invisible any more in many movement groups. There has been a formalistic recognition of gay liberation by such diverse groups as the Black Panther Party, International Socialists, Peace & Freedom Party, the Young Socialist Alliance, the Yippies and various local collectives and underground papers. This has not, in my opinion, altered the basic pattern of anti-gay oppression within the straight movement. When I told the people at LNS I was gay, they didn't express any overt hostility to me for that. But the men there steadfastly held on to their own straight identity. I could not even begin to establish a gay identity, could not even begin to struggle with my own sexism and elitism, in such hostile surroundings. Among straight people, I must suppress many of my feelings. Shared experiences around my oppression are minimal.

There are many well-intentioned people in the straight movement who like to define the revolutionary forces in this country as a melange of diverse groups in struggle—workers, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians, Asians, women and gays—often expressed in that order. I myself often grasp at this idealized vision of what is supposedly happening. We do have a common enemy in U.S. imperialism; and that provides us with a certain sense of unity. But the straight movement has continually asked gay people to deny the validity of the gay struggle.

Our battle with the Venceremos Brigade is a good example. In New York, in June 1970, during the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots, *Gay Power,* a now-defunct gay movement newspaper, scheduled a benefit at the Elgin movie theater. Through an error, the management of the theater gave the same date to the Venceremos Brigade. When it came down to deciding who would use the theater that night (both groups had done publicity), the Venceremos Brigade used the prestige of the straight movement and of the Cuban revolution (which has been consistently anti-homosexual) to convince the management to choose them over the gay people. I went to the Elgin that night, frightened and confused at the conflict that was occurring. I was active in GLF only six months; I knew the Brigade people for a year or more. I sat on a fence, supporting *Gay Power* at first, but eventually losing patience with the gays' anger and militant struggle. Finally, I shouted something about being part of an "international communist movement," hoping that the gay people would shut up so we could

watch movies about Vietnam. I am still ashamed of how I behaved that night at the Elgin, though mostly I am angry at how the straight movement made me reject my gay sisters and brothers at that time.

I had been involved as a "closet" gay in the earliest organizational meetings of the brigade. Dozens of gay people cut cane in the first and second brigade without being able to come out. As long as we hid our homosexuality, we were "right on" brothers and sisters. In the third brigade, a number of openly gay people participated, only after sharp struggle, but the straight people administering the brigade (and the Cubans, too) did not commit themselves to the politics of gay liberation. Gays on the third brigade suffered great oppression. The expectation was that the gays would submerge their identities and their struggle to the concept of anti-imperialist unity and support for the Cuban revolution. In other words, the straight people running the brigade will accept us only if we accept our oppression and return to the closet.

We gays want and need autonomy, yet the straight movement continually denies the validity of our struggle. Gays are constantly being asked by the straight movement to prove ourselves. I am keenly aware of this because, as a former member in good standing of the New Left, I am constantly being told by former comrades things like, "Well, we know that *you* are anti-imperialist, but we don't know about a lot of the other people in gay liberation." I cannot accept this attempt to separate me from my gay sisters and brothers. I echo the simple demand once made by a gay sister in an article about the Venceremos Brigade: "Marxist, schmarxist, get off our backs!" I am still so encumbered by the sexist mentality of the left that it is actually a longer, more difficult process for me to develop a gay identity and struggle against sexism. I am constantly being coerced, gently or arrogantly, to provide a class analysis of homosexuality, to answer allegations about "bourgeois decadence"—and more often than not I yield to this coercion. But this is just one of the ways that so-called Marxists have put down homosexuals. We don't have to answer any of these questions; the onus is on the straight movement to deal with its sexism. Our struggle is denied by straight people who think of themselves as being part of the "broader struggle," who define themselves as the "real revolutionaries." We do not get validated by our participation in anti-war marches; we join those marches because imperialist wars are sexist. Straight leftists will accept us as long as they can conceive of us as something like "United Homosexuals for Peace, Equality and Socialism." We are opposed to capitalism, racism and war, but we express that opposition by using our energy to oppose sexism. We are for gay liberation, which we see as a total revolutionary movement. The oppression which we suffer from straight society, and our consequent quest for freedom, is the only justification or validation we need.

After the police raid at the Stonewall Inn, the gay militants chose the name Gay Liberation Front, in homage to the Vietnamese guerrillas. The group has never been a "front," in the real sense of the term (a collection of groups), but the name stuck and was picked up in dozens of other cities. (GLF has dissolved as an organization in some places, including New York and Berkeley, but the basic political values of GLF continue to be projected.)

GLF defined itself from the beginning as being different from the early homophile and lesbian organizations. These groups, including the Mattachine Society, the Society of Individual Rights (SIR), and the Daughters of Bilitis, were formed in the 1950s and early 1960s primarily as civil rights and social groups. Lacking an explicit understanding of sexism, though fully aware of oppression, the members of these groups struggled to halt the anti-homosexual hysteria of McCarthyism, to combat the most overt forms of anti-homosexualism such as police brutality, and to provide social activities.

The homophile groups, as well as some of the newer groups such as the Gay Activists Alliance, work primarily toward the elimination of laws to enable gays to do our own thing. Gay liberation is a more far-reaching concept. It is premised on consciousness-raising on sexism toward the goal of sexual liberation for all. Gay liberation also has a perspective for revolution based on the unity of all oppressed people—that is, there can be no freedom for gays in a society which enslaves others through male supremacy, racism and economic exploitation (capitalism).

In any case, some events bring us all together, at least momentarily. The first large mass action by gay people was the June 1970 Christopher Street Gay Pride March from Greenwich Village up the Avenue of the Americas to Central Park. Some 10,000 people participated, some of them members of gay groups, the vast majority coming from the disparate gay community. It was a big step for gay people to be in the street, and many of us recognized many more gay people watching from the sidewalk with an ambivalent look of fear and pride on their faces. On June 27, 1971, Christopher Street and Christopher Street West Gay Pride Marches—considerably larger than the previous year's parades—were held in New York and Los Angeles.

From the outset, the Gay Liberation Front was an organization of male homosexuals and lesbians. By the spring of 1970, many of the GLF women began a separate caucus, and before long this turned into a new, separate group, the Radicalesbians. The lesbians were responding to a situation in which they were wasting their energies pointing out sexist attitudes to men. They decided to respond to their unique situation as gay women and they were joined by many lesbians from the feminist movement who had not previously associated with gay liberation. Other women continued to function as a part of GLF, noting that "our strongest common denominator and greatest oppression lies with society's injustice against us as homosexuals." In several cities, black, Latin and Asian homosexuals formed separate caucuses and groups. In New York and Chicago, Third World Gay Revolution has been working to combat racist attitudes of white homosexuals and to struggle against anti-gay attitudes in the third world communities. Another separate organization, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), was started in the fall of 1970 in New York to meet the special needs of transvestites. The work of the gay liberation movement—its organizational progress, its media, its demonstrations—are meaningful only in the context of consciousness about sexism.

FOR GAY PEOPLE, THE ESSENTIAL POINT is to see limited sexuality as an end result of male supremacy and sex roles. Gay, in its most far-reaching sense, means not homosexual, but sexually free. This includes a long-range vision of sensuality as a basis for sexual relationships. This sexual freedom is not some kind of groovy life style with lots of sex, doing what feels good irrespective of others. It is sexual freedom premised upon the notion of pleasure through equality, no pleasure where there is inequality.

Straight people (and some gays) cringe when we chant "Two, four, six, eight, gay is twice as good as straight!" This slogan reflects our understanding of homosexuality as a superior way of life to heterosexuality as we experience it. Heterosexual relationships are encumbered by notions of how men and women are supposed to behave. It is a system which has male supremacy built in—although I have seen many straight people engaged in honest struggle against sexism. Homosexuals committed to struggling against sexism have a better chance than straights to build relationships based on equality because there is less enforcement of roles. We have already broken with gender programming, so we can more easily move toward equality.

Gay is good for all of us. The artificial categories "heterosexual" and "homosexual" have been laid on us by a sexist society. Children are born sexual. To protect the power of straight men in a sexist society, homosexuality becomes prohibited behavior. As gays, we demand an end to the gender programming which starts when we are born (pink for girls, blue for boys). The nuclear family, with its man-woman model built in by the presence of parents, is the primary means by which this restricted sexuality is created and enforced. Gays experience rejection by the family in a society where familial love is considered important. The family oppresses women and children as well as gays. The phenomena of runaway teenagers and increasing divorce rates are signs of the erosion of the nuclear family. Gay liberation is another sign. We attack the nuclear family when we reject our parents' plea to get married and have a family. We are committed to building liberated communal situations where children can grow strong and free.

Straights who are threatened by us like to accuse us of separatism—but our understanding of sexism is premised on the idea that in the free society everyone will be free of sex-determined roles, i.e., gay. It may be utopian to think that all people who now define themselves as "straight" will become gay, but it is not utopian to ask people who call themselves revolutionaries to struggle against sexism by working toward establishing a gay identity and combatting male power. We have a separate movement of gay people because we are fighting for survival; that is the only way we can establish an identity and advance our struggle.

While we have a vision of a free society, we do not claim to be a superior breed of people. We do pride ourselves on our commitment to struggle, and we know that most, if not all, straight men will do everything in their power to resist gay liberation because by staying straight they stay privileged and powerful—at least in the short run. I can say this much about myself: I obtain a sense of well-being and confidence when I blend in with straight men which is directly linked to power and privilege, and that is hard to give up. There are rewards in the other direction, however. As I develop a gay identity, I feel much more in touch with my humanity than when I was regularly passing for straight. I am swept up in a process of change which allows me to define myself in terms other than some masculine ideal. I have a growing awareness of myself and my relationships to other people which is exhilarating and deeply satisfying. My understanding of the need for revolutionary change is deeper than ever. I dance more, I laugh more, I cry more, I am learning how to listen to others. I have sex less often but find it infinitely more satisfying. I am finding out how to love my sisters and brothers, how this love is the vital revolutionary force we all need.

One of the longest-running gay male consciousness-raising groups recently published a paper which sums up much of the revolutionary humanistic dimension of our struggle:

"Gays must organize because it is the only way a class of people that has been cut adrift by society can deal with that fact. Everywhere we find hostility, prejudice and condescension, even amongst ourselves. Most gays accept, in self-defense, the straight man's mythology that says we're sick, immature, perverse, deviant, and thus should hide our love away in tearooms [i.e., public toilets], park bushes, on cruising streets, and in Mafia- or otherwise pig-controlled bars. Those who reject the mythology, developing positive attitudes toward their homosexuality, are even more offensive to straights. We all risk brutalization and imprisonment and have little alternative but to use the traditional oppressive cruising institutions. These myths and institutions keep us isolated and distrustful of each other. And don't expect any help from our straight oppressors in creating alternatives. We're on our own.

"In our consciousness-raising group, we have been trying to step outside the straight man's myths and institutions, to suspend the limited ways we deal with each other, and experiment with new ways of relating. Everyone's feelings are considered in consciousness-raising, and instead of shouting each other down, consensus, a solution that is to each person's interest, can be reached. If people are silent, they are asked to contribute. This is part of the collective process. We as men are struggling with our eagerness to dominate and ego-trip by being aware of the needs of others in the group, and struggling with our tendency to intellectualize by speaking from our experience. We are also learning what has been forbidden us—to relate to one another with respect and love."

Allen Young has been active in the gay liberation movement in New York since early 1970.

"Most of the ideas expressed here are the result of a collective process, involving many gay sisters and brothers who have engaged me in struggle. I am a white male homosexual who has identified with the radical left for many years and most of what I say is from that perspective—so I cannot speak for all gay people. There are other homosexuals—lesbians, third world people, transvestites—about whom I can say little. They speak for themselves."

Young, Allen. "A Gay Manifesto." William and John, no. 7, [November 1972], pp. 46+. Archives of Sexuality and Gender, link.gale.com/apps/doc/ZZIQQG892936242/AHSI?u=nypl&sid=bookmark-AHSI. Accessed 5 Mar. 2024.